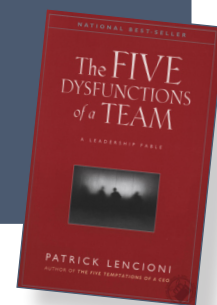


The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable

Book by Patrick Lencioni

Book review provided by Lt. Cmdr. Jeanine Womble, International Law (Code 10)



In a recent interview with the Miami Heat's Three Kings (LeBron James, Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh) the basketball superstars made it clear that the secret to their success in capturing the NBA national championship was embracing an approach similar to the one Lencioni explains in this book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*. The three men agreed that the difference between their 2011 failure to win the championship and victory was putting aside their need to be the star, being open to each other's critiques and putting the good of the team above their personal glory. This is Lencioni's model in a nutshell: simple, easy to understand, intuitively correct and enormously difficult to implement.

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The author's thesis is that to be an effective team, team members need to overcome natural traits of self-protection, ego, and aversion to conflict with peers. Lencioni believes that only teams that embrace these traits and create an environment in which individuals can overcome their natural tendencies will maximize their effectiveness. Like the Three Kings, members of an effective management team must put aside their egos, make themselves vulnerable to criticism, overcome the discomfort of confronting a peer's failure and commit wholly to a shared goal.

Having been written a decade before the Miami Heat's 2012 run for the National Championship (and to make it more palatable to a business audience), Lencioni illustrates his theory through a fictional leadership fable. The book begins as Kathryn Petersen, an experienced executive, takes over as CEO of an underachieving Silicon Valley technology start-up. The company seemingly has all of the right components for success, a great product, plenty of capital and a talented leadership team, and yet is falling behind its competitors. The CEO quickly realizes that the company's progress has been hampered by ineffective teamwork. The book uses the CEO's efforts to reform her team to introduce the reader to the five dysfunctions.

The fable is an effective device for demonstrating the author's approach to teamwork. As we are introduced to the author's theories, we are also witness to the team members' reactions and over-reactions, their resistance to change and the methods the new CEO uses to address these. The use of the fable as a teaching tool is the most effective element

of the book. I immediately and painfully empathized with the characters and recognized the dynamics present within this team.

As cliché as it sounds, the solution, whether it be basketball or business, begins with trust. Admitting that "trust" is one of the most overused words in English language, Lencioni demonstrates that his definition differs from conventional usage. Instead of trust as predictability (e.g., I know I can assign you a task and you will do it well and on time because you have demonstrated that capacity before), he advocates for teams to create a deeper trust. In the author's vision, team members believe that their peers have good intentions and that each team member has placed the good of the team before their own personal success. With this foundation, the members can abandon their need to be guarded or dishonest with each other. While this type of statement is easy to dismiss as touchy-feely babble, isn't that what the Three Kings had to do in Miami? They each had to believe that when the other critiqued their play or failed to pass the ball that it was for the good of team not an individual's personal good. Had any one of them not made that leap of faith, ego would have gotten in the way of victory. Likewise, as simple as the notion seems, Lencioni's scenario illustrates that it is just as hard to develop that trust in a professional setting.

Lencioni's book falls a little short when it comes to tips on real-

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world application. While the fable itself demonstrates a way to put the author's theory into action, and the last chapter discusses each dysfunction in more detail outside the context of the fable, I was left with more questions than answers. A team that implemented Lencioni's principles would be undeniably effective. But, the teams that are most likely to buy-in to his approach are the ones facing the direst consequences for the failure to do so. In the fable, the company's very survival is at stake. Likewise, in military units where the failure to trust, engage in constructive conflict, and hold each other accountable can result in not only mission failure but death, a teamwork model closer to Lencioni's is often evident.

In naval aviation, by necessity a flight crew must trust each other, engage in constructive conflict, and hold each other accountable for individual failures. The flight crew's goal is not only achievement of a mission objective but a safe return to the ship. In a headquarters setting, where nothing so grim as death, bankruptcy, or even loss of a national championship looms, leaders are likely to encounter considerable resistance to Lencioni's approach. That said, the leader who is willing to endure a little snickering from their team and embrace the risk of making themselves vulnerable to their subordinates' critique could reap considerable dividends in mission accomplishment. I plan to put Lencioni's principles into action and you should consider his approach for strengthening your trial team, division or department.

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Civilian Personnel Management Services

The Office of the Judge Advocate General (OJAG) launched Civilian Personnel Management Services (Code 66) in April 2012 to ensure civilian workforce interests are addressed and well-represented at the headquarters level.

Code 66 performs classification/position management, administers training, manages time and attendance/payroll, oversees performance management, and coordinates with Human Resource Offices worldwide. The department is composed of four civilians with experience in civilian personnel matters.

Within Code 66's first year, they will play an integral role in many ongoing and new projects. These include: Defense Service Office realignment, civilian tuition reimbursement, telework policy revision, pilot civilian mentoring program, time and attendance policy revision, total force billet mapping, civilian award policy updates, redesign of the OJAG civilian website, and the Department of Navy's Human Resource Service Delivery reorganization. Code 66 also provides advice to the JAG Corps' Civilian Advisory Panel regarding their various initiatives including the Civilian Personnel Management Manual Quick Guide. When published, this reference will provide new supervisors a consolidated guide that highlights the most pressing issues and focus areas of which a quality manager of civilians ought to be aware.

Code 66 looks forward to the exciting opportunities that lay ahead for the OJAG and NLSC civilian corps and is eager to see them realized.



Civilian Personnel Management Services (Code 66) personnel Megan Kidwell, Erica Williams, and Nathaniel Greathouse. (not pictured: Amy Stevens)